Rev John Rice D.D.

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A

PASTORAL LETTER,

ADDRESSED PARTICULARLY

TO THE

CHURCHES,

BOTH SETTLED AND VACANT,

UNDER THE CARE

OF THE

SECOND PRESBYTERY

OF THE

CAROLINAS AND GEORGIA.

Augusta:

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Cedar-Spring, Oct. 31, 1820.

PRESBYTERY took into consideration the subject of writing a pastoral letter to the churches. Resolved—That the situation of our churches calls our attention to this duty, and that —— ——, be appointed to write this letter and have it ready for the inspection of Presbytery at our next meeting. The blank was filled with the name of the Rev. JOHN T. PRESSLY. The letter being accordingly produced and read, and some additions and amendments being proposed, Resolved—that it be recommitted to the writer, and that he forthwith prepare it for the press,

Extracted from the minutes,

ROBERT IRWIN, *Moderator.*

JOHN T. PRESSLY, *Clerk.*

LETTER TO THE CHURCHES.

CHRISTIAN BRETHREN,

WHEN we reflect upon the important relation in which we stand connected with you, as those whose great duty it is, to *watch for your souls;* we cannot look with indifference upon your situation. As we have shortly to meet with you at an impartial tribunal, where an account must be given of the manner in which we have discharged the duties of spiritual overseers; we desire to be employed now in such a manner that you may be presented *faultless before the presence of Jehovah's glory*— and that we may be prepared to give *our account with joy and not with grief.* As the Lord may enable us, desire to labour in season and out of season for your growth in grace and in the knowledge of Christ Jesus; that so we may be instrumental in preparing you who now share the burdens and conflicts of the church militant, for joining that triumphant throng, the days of whose trial are ended. By these considerations, we have been induced at this time to address you by letter.

Ever since that declaration of God addressed to the serpent, *I will put enmity betwixt thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed,* the church of Christ has had to encounter opposition in the world. And were it not that God the Lord is in the midst of her, she would long since have been crushed by her enemies.

The great Adversary carries on his opposition to the church, through the instrumentality of *the world* and of *false professors.*

The kingdom of Christ which is in the world, is not of the world, and therefore the world has ever been

attempting to effect its destruction. This attempt, has at one time been made openly and boldly, at another time, more secretly. Accordingly, the spirit of opposition has sometimes drawn the sword and shed the blood of thousands *of whom the world was not worthy.* Owing, however, to the subduing efficacy of the gospel, the sword of persecution at this time slumbers in its scabbard. But we are greatly mistaken if we imagine that *the spirit* of persecution also slumbers. That spirit of opposition in the world to the kingdom of Christ is still as active and as malignant as ever; and if it operates more secretly its operations are not the less successful. Take care then, brethren, lest the world deceive you. The angry scowl of open persecution is laid aside; but the smile which is assumed, covers the same dark and murderous designs. If Satan can by his flattery allure you into his service, he accomplishes his object equally as well, as though by his frowns he should drive you away from the service of Christ. Then, *be not conformed to the world.* Avoid the *sinful practices* and the *unhallowed amusements* of the world; for *because of these things the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience.* As far as possible keep out of the way of the ungodly, and associate not with those who are the open and avowed enemies of your Lord and Saviour. *He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but a companion of fools shall be destroyed. Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.* And the most effectual way in which you can reprove the works of darkness, is to walk as *children of the light*, and to *make your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works.*

The church is now, and always has been, exposed to danger from *false professors.* It grieved the heart of Paul, and it cannot but be a cause of sorrow to all the children of God, to observe, that many of those who profess the name of Christ, evidence by their deportment that they are *enemies to the cross of Christ.* There are many who have a tolerably

meets us in the imposing garb of sanctity? When viewed fairly it is this:—Since we have reason to apprehend some difficulty in the discharge of a plain and positive duty, therefore we will not attempt it. For fear we should be interrupted by bad company, while attempting to observe the Sabbath as a day of sacred rest, therefore we will in the most open and palpable manner profane it, by observing it as a day of labour! O, brethren, will you permit your reason and your consciences thus to be imposed upon? Can you thus trifle with God's sacred institutions?

This is a complicated evil. It is not only impiously robbing God of that service which he claims from us, but it is depriving our horses of that rest which is their right by the solemn appointment of God. Let it not be said, that we deprive our horses of rest by employing them in attending the worship of the sanctuary. The cases are essentially different. In the former case we employ our horses in our temporal concerns; in the latter we avail ourselves of their assistance in the service of God.

The profanation of God's name, is another prevalent evil, against which, in the name of the King of Zion, we warn you to guard. This evil, we fear is much more common amongst us, than it formerly was. And it is to be apprehended that it will increase, inasmuch as it is, owing to the degenerate taste of the times, considered by many as *fashionable!* This, like the preceding evil, is a violation of our civil law, as well as of the law of God; yet it is very commonly permitted to pass unpunished by those who. from their office, ought to be a *terror to evil-doers.* But though it may escape punishment at the bar of human justice, recollect, O young man, not yet completely hardened in iniquity, *the Lord our God will not hold him guiltless who taketh his name in vain.*

We need scarcely add that *drunkenness* is another prevalent evil, because of which Zion mourneth. This is one of the most degrading forms in which ini-

quity can be practised. And yet it is so common amongst us from the beardless lad to the man of gray hairs, that there are many who seem not to believe the declaration of God himself, that, *Drunkards shall nave no inheritance in the kingdom of God.*

The prevalence of these and other evils, is an evidence of the declension of practical religion. A neglect of the commandments and ordinances of the Lord must prevail, or these evil practices would not abound. It is in vain then to expect to see a relinquishment of these ungodly deeds, unless there is a revival of the power of true godliness.

We crave your indulgence then while we direct your attention to some important duties which are lamentably neglected—*The secret exercises of devotion*, are unhappily disregarded. By these we understand, *prayer, reading God's word, meditation, self-examination*, and such like. These exercises are essential to the existence of the christian life, and just in proportion as real godliness is flourishing within us, will they be regarded. The true children of God have always been a *praying people.* They have, also, been always characterised by their high regard for the word of God. *The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver. O how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day.* Prayer and the sword of the spirit which is the word of God, are most important articles of the christian armour, and he who lays these aside becomes an easy prey to the adversary.

Professor of the name of Christ if thou dost neglect to consult his word for thy direction, is it wonderful if he leaves thee to wander in the darkness of thine own blinded understanding? If thou dost neglect to ask the help and protection of thine Almighty King, think it not strange if thou art left to fall before the power of temptation. If we were attentive to our own experience we would perhaps find it to be true, that our adversary never gains any signal victory over us,

except when we have been neglectful of the secret exercises of devotion. While the believer maintains a correspondence with the court of Heaven by prayer, he receives *grace and mercy to help in time of need,* and the adversary is easily foiled. But let the enemy succeed in interrupting this correspondence, let the believer be left to draw upon his own resources, and then Satan obtains an easy conquest. Art thou professedly a disciple of Christ? Behold thy master upon the solitary mountain before it was yet day, pouring forth prayers and supplications unto God, and evidence that thou art a disciple indeed, by imitating his example—by improving thine exalted privilege of coming with boldness to the throne of grace, that thou mayest obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

It is cause of grief and also of astonishment to us to find that, *the worship of God in the family,* is neglected by so many of those who profess subjection to the authority of Christ. It is admitted to be a duty, but *want of time* is offered as an apology for its neglect. It might be well for such to recollect that they will soon find time to meet with God at death and at the bar of judgment. And O thou negligent professor, PREPARE *to meet thy God.* Others plead *bashfulness,* as an excuse for the neglect of God's worship. We would entreat such to ponder upon those words of the Saviour:—*Whosoever shall be ashamed of me in this sinful generation, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.*

We have no doubt but that the great cause of that inattention to divine things which is so generally characteristic of our youth, is to be found in the *neglect of family religion.* In our younger years we are usually disposed to place implicit confidence in our parents. The opinions and practices of our parents constitute the standard by which we are disposed to try the opinions and practices of all other men. Where then, the reading of God's word, prayer, the

singing of divine praise, and such religious exercises are neglected in the family by the parent, the child concludes that these things are improper, or at least unnecessary. And the consequence usually is, the child grows up under the influence of a prejudice against the worship of God, and imitates the parent's neglect. The ruin of the child under such circumstances, is chargeable to those who, under God, are the authors of its existence! Think, undutiful parents, how will your future misery be aggravated by the cutting reflection, that your neglect of God's worship, has not only brought ruin upon yourselves, but was also the occasion of your children's destruction! How will you be able to bear the reproaches of your own children, while they shall upbraid you as the authors of all their woe! How important then is it that you now faithfully discharge your obligation, *to bring up your offspring in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*

And let not the christian parent suppose that the proposal of a good example constitutes the whole of a parents duty. It is indeed a most important part, but only a part of parental duty. God hath been pleased to subject the child to the authority of the parent, and it is a solemn duty incumbent upon the parent to exercise authority over the child, in *training it up in the way wherein it should go while it is young.* And where this duty has been neglected by the parent, the displeasure of God has usually been visible in some form or other—the child has generally been a grief and a dishonour to the parent. This most honorable testimony is borne to the character of Abraham by God himself—*I know my servant Abraham that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord.*

It is a great grief to us, to find that the *religious instruction of our children* is neglected by so many parents. The important season of youth when the character is to be formed, is neglected, and the mind instead of being *rooted and grounded in the knowledge of divine truth,* is inflated with vanity, and is

liable *to be tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine.* The active mind of youth will be employed—and if it is not exercised about those things which relate to our peace, it will be occupied with those things which are either unprofitable or sinful.

And even where the religious instruction of the family, is not wholly neglected, the parent too generally satisfies himself with proposing a few questions from a book. Now we are very far from condemning this practice. Our only objection to it is, that it does not go far enough. It certainly lacks much of coming up to the divine direction: *Thou shalt teach them diligently to thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down and when thou risest up.* Parents are lamentably neglectful of the important duty of *conversing familiarly* with their children on religious subjects. It is too common for parents to manifest such reserve upon the great and interesting topics of christianity as is calculated to impress the minds of children with the idea that the christian religion is a mysterious something which should be kept inviolably secret from the world. And what is the consequence? When the youth associate together they have no disposition for religious conversation. A religious topic must not be mentioned, or it instantaneously produces awful silence. It is certainly a humiliating consideration, that probably three fourths of the conversation in society amongst rational and immortal beings, consists of unedifying and often injurious remarks, respecting the conduct or dress, of this or that individual who has lately been seen. When men are not in the habit of conversing upon religious subjects, they will not exercise their minds much about such matters; and the consequence is, that gross ignorance in relation to the things of eternity will prevail.

In order that parents may be qualified for the religious instruction of their children, it is easy to see that

diligence on their part, in reading and reflection will be essentially necessary. The parent must grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ, in order that he may be prepared to teach his children the way of the Lord. This is a duty not generally appreciated according to its importance. There are very few parents amongst us, who are furnished with the one-fourth of those books which are necessary for the instruction of the family. Many seem to think that if they have a volume or two of Boston, of Brown, or of Erskine, they have a sufficient library! Now we are far from insinuating any thing like disrespect towards those learned and godly writers; but we should be thankful, that God has raised up many others whom he hath endued with heavenly wisdom, to edify the church by their writings. And while we are still to regard the Bible as THE BOOK, which is to be prized above all others, and by which all others are to be tried; yet we should thankfully improve such helps as may be afforded, that so we may obtain a correct and enlarged acquaintance with the word of God. We are sorry that we have so much cause to adopt the words of Paul to the Hebrews—*When for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again, what be the first principles of the oracles of God.* Now in a country situated as ours is, this ignorance is without excuse. It is the result of most *criminal negligence.* We have God's word delivered to us in our own language. We enjoy civil and religious liberty. We have the wisdom and learning of ages set before us in the volumes of those learned and laborious men of God, who being dead yet speak to us in their writings. And yet shall we be satisfied to remain ignorant of the things which belong to our peace? *No! Brethren, we hope better things of you, and things that accompany salvation though we thus speak.*

HAVE patience, Christian Brethren, while we remind you of another duty which has hitherto been much neglected. We refer to the duty of contributing of your temporal wealth for the support and ex-

tension of the Redeemer's kingdom. We speak not now particularly in relation to the support of the gospel amongst ourselves; though we are aware that in many places there is much need for serious admonition upon this subject. We now refer to the general interests of the church.

God in his providence is, through the medium of christian liberality, establishing religious seminaries for the purpose of training up a pious, learned and evangelical ministry. He is sending his Bible to the regions of moral darkness, in the native tongue of almost every nation. He is sending forth the messengers of salvation to the thousands of benighted heathen who are perishing for lack of knowledge—and while these benevolent exertions of the church below, are exciting in angelic breasts, the most thrilling joy, our southern churches, with few exceptions, have assumed the attitude of cold and indifferent spectators.

O! Christian Brethren, do you really believe that though the Lord Jesus was rich, he became poor for your sakes, that through his poverty you might be rich? And are you unwilling to give back to him a small portion of the wealth he has conferred upon you, when he asks it at your hands? Does he on whom you depend for every temporal and eternal blessing, request a small portion of your substance to aid in sending his gospel to those perishing sinners, whom he has purchased with his blood; and will you send him away empty? Will you send him away empty *disciple of* THE LORD JESUS? *No! We are persuaded better things of you,* and things more honorable to your christian profession. You will *honour the Lord with your substance and with the first fruits of all your increase.* And God's blessing shall rest on your basket and your store. *Your barns shall be filled with plenty, and your presses shall burst out with new wine, for* THE MOUTH OF JEHOVAH HATH SPOKEN IT.

Thus freely and plainly, christian brethren, have

we endeavored *to stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance,* in relation to some things which we conceive to be of importance. And if we have in some instances adopted the language of reproof, we have at the same time been actuated by the spirit of love. Our heart's desire and prayer to God for you is, not merely that you may be saved, but that an entrance may be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Finally, Brethren, *be at peace among yourselves, and let brotherly love continue. Now the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Christ Jesus to whom be glory for ever and ever.*—AMEN.